

Message Text

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45

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-11 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

INRE-00 SAM-01 SAB-01 OMB-01 AID-05 USIE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 DHA-02 /084 W

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O R 201410Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8240

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NY

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER IMMEDIATE

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

COMMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX ZERO

CTF SIX ONE

CTF SIX TWO

CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO

FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA

DIA WASHDC

CIA WASHDC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 642

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION HITS NEW LOW

REF BEIRUT 606 (1452Z), 75 BEIRUT 15472 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: CLASHES CONTINUE IN BEIRUT SUBURBS AND OTHER PARTS OF COUNTRY AS PALESTINIAN FORCES, SUBSTANTIALLY LESS NUMEROUS THAN CLAIMED BY MININT CHAMOUN, CONTINUE TO ENTER COUNTRY FROM SYRIA. PHALANGISTS AND CHRISTIAN ALLIES HAVE, FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES, QUELLED RESISTANCE OF ENCLAVES IN QUARANTINA/MASLAKH AND MAY BE TURNING THEIR ATTENTION TODAY TO PREDOMINANTLY SHIITE ENCLAVE OF NABA' EAST OF BEIRUT RIVER. KARAME STILL HAS NOT SUBMITTED WRITTEN RESIGNATION AND PROBABLY WILL NOT RPT NOT DO SO FOR IMMEDIATE FUTURE, ALTHOUGH HE RELIABLY REPORTED TO BE HOLDING OUT FOR POLITICAL AGREEMENT BEFORE AGREEING TO REMAIN. PRES FRANGIE REMAINS IN CONTACT WITH SYRIANS AND WORKED OUT YET ANOTHER CEASEFIRE FOR 2100 HOURS JAN 19; CEASEFIRE ROUTINELY INEFFECTIVE, BUT CONTACTS AND CONSULTATIONS TOO NUMEROUS TO FOLLOW ARE UNDER WAY TO EASE INCREASINGLY DANGEROUS SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTERNOON OF JAN 19 SAW RESUMPTION OF ARMED CLASHES IN MOST TRADITIONAL TROUBLE SPOTS AROUND CAPITAL, ALTHOUGH HOTEL DISTRICT REMAINED RELATIVELY QUIET AND SPORADIC EXPLOSIONS AND LIMITED FIRE FIGHTS DISTURBED SERENITY OF RAS BEIRUT OVERNIGHT. CHRISTIAN MILITAMEN SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLETED TASK LATE JAN 19 OF REDUCING QUARANTINA/MASLAKH DEFENSES AND SENT UNKNOWN NUMBER OF SURVIVORS TO WEST BEIRUT WHERE THEY WILL PROBABLY JOIN BANDS OF LOOTERS AND MARAUDERS. WE EXPECT CHRISTIAN FORCES TO TURN THEIR ATTENTION SOON TO LARGELY SHIITE AREA OF NABA' (BETWEEN SINN AL FIL AND BOURJ HAMMOUD) WHERE SOME PALESTINIAN AND PROGRESSIVE FORCES ARE ALSO EMPLACED. WE UNDERSTAND THAT PHALANGIST ARTILLERY MAY ALREADY HAVE BEGUN PRELIMINARY BOMBARDMENT OF NABA'. OPPOSING FORCES HAVE MEAN WHILE INTENSIFIED PRESSURE ON CHRISTIAN SUBURB OF AIN RUMMANEH. AT APPROXIMATELY 2030 HOURS JAN 19, UNIDENTIFIED ARMED ELEMENTS STAGED SIMULTANEOUS ATTACKS ON EMIR BASHIR AND EMIR FAKREDDINE ARMY BARRACKS (RAMLET AL BAIDA/UNESCO AREA), BUT WERE BEATEN OFF WITH LOSS OF ONE ARMY OFFICER AND ABOUT SIX WOUNDED.

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3. ATTACKS UPON ARMY INSTALLATIONS IN BEIRUT WERE POSSIBLY PART OF COUNTRYWIDE CAMPAIGN TO STRIKE GOL FACILITIES AND INSTALLATIONS AS WIDESPREAD REPORTS OF SIMILAR INCIDENTS, MANY DIFFICULT TO VERIFY, ARE BEING RECEIVED. WE UNDERSTAND THERE HAS BEEN AND CONTINUES TO BE HEAVY FIGHTING AROUND ZAHLE WHERE LEBANESE ARMY IS APPARENTLY ENGAGING LOCAL GUNMEN AND PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS AS HAS HAPPENED PREVIOUSLY. UNCONFIRMED REPORTS ALSO SPEAK OF ARMY CLASHES WITH

PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS IN WESTERN BEKAA AT RASHAYA AL WADI AND ENVIRONS; AKKAR REMAINS EXTREMELY TENSE WITH PARTICULAR CONCERN RE QULEILAT AIR BASE, WHERE SKIRMISHES BETWEEN LEBANESE ARMY DEFENDING AND ALLEGED UNITS OF FATAH'S YARMUK BRIGADE APPARENTLY OCCURRED LAST NIGHT. LEBANESE GENDARMERIE SOURCE REPORTS INCREASED SANDBAG EMPLACEMENTS AND ARMED CHECKPOINTS IN SIDON; AT TYRE, SERAIL WAS ATTACKED BY GROUP REPORTEDLY COMPOSED PRIMARILY OF LOCAL COMMUNIST ELEMENTS AND PRISONERS WERE SET FREE IN WHAT HAS BECOME COMMON PRACTICE. WHATEVER SHORTAGES THIS RAVAGED COUNTRY MAY BE EXPERIENCING, SECURITY IS THE SCARCEST COMMODITY AROUND.

4. PICKING UP ON JAN 19 PRESS REPORTS OF INFLUX OF TROOPS INTO BEKAA VALLEY FROM SYRIA, MININT CHAMOUN, STILL HOLED UP IN HIS VILLA AT SAADIYAT SOUTH OF DAMOUR HAS ONCE AGAIN (SEE REFTEL B) ANNOUNCED SYRIAN RPT SYRIAN INVASION OF LEBANON. CHAMOUN'S FIGURE OF 8,000 INCOMING TROOPS IS PLUCKED DIRECTLY FROM PRESS, ALTHOUGH LEBANESE ARMY G-2 NOW PLACES INFLUX AT 3,200. SEVERAL SOURCES, INCLUDING BRIG. DAHRAOUGE OF GENDARMERIE, CONTEND THAT MANY OF THESE FORCES--BELIEVED TO BE UNITS OF PALESTINE LIBERATION ARMY (PLA), FATAH YARMUK BRIGADE AND SA'IQA-- ARE ARRIVING IN SYRIAN ARMY TRUCKS WHICH RETURNING EMPTY TO DAMASCUS. THERE NO DOUBT THAT SUBSTANTIAL PALESTINIAN REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVING IN BEKAA WITH KNOWLEDGE AND ASSISTANCE OF SYRIAN GOVT, BUT ULTIMATE INTENTIONS REMAIN UNCLEAR. SEEMS PROBABLE THAT SOME UNITS WILL ENTER INTO LOCAL FRAYS (EG, AT ZAHLE) IF THEY CONTINUE, BUT THAT BULK OF FORCE WILL BE HELD IN RESERVE FOR USE ONLY IF FULLSCALE CONFLICT BREAKS OUT BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE ARMY.

5. POLITICALLY, SITUATION REMAINS RELATIVELY STATIC ALTHOUGH THERE CONSIDERABLE RUNNING ABOUT. PRES FRANGIE'S ENVOY LUCIEN DAHDAH RETURNED JAN 19 FROM DAMASCUS WITH CEASEFIRE PLAN WHICH FRANGIE ACCEPTED IN PHONE CONVERSATION WITH SYRIAN LEADERS. UNOBSERVED CEASEFIRE WAS TO TAKE EFFECT 2100 HOURS JAN 19 WITH FRANGIE ALL-CONFIDENTIAL

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EGEDLY GUARANTEEING CHRISTIAN OBSERVANCE AND PRES ASAD UNDERTAKING TOO ASSURE COMPLIANCE OF PALESTINIANS AND THEIR ALLIES. PLAN, WHICH ALSO REPORTEDLY CALLED FOR LIFTING OF RECIPROCAL BLOCKADES OF TEL ZAATAR AND DAMOUR AND RETURN OF EXPELLEES TO DBAYE REFUGEE CAMP AND QUARANTINA, WAS STILLBORN. MUSLIMS, PROGRESSIVES AND PALESTINIANS APPARENTLY WERE INCENSED OVER CONTINUING CHRISTIAN CLEANUP OF QUARANTINA AND CHAMOUN APPARENTLY REFUSED (PROBABLY WITH SUPPORT OF AT LEAST SOME PHALANGIST ELEMENTS) TO ACCEPT STANDOWN IN FACE OF THEIR "VICTORIES".

6. WE EXPECT FRANGIE/SYRIAN CONTACTS TO CONTINUE IN EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE PLOTICAL AGREEMENT AND EVERYBODY AND HIS BROTHER IS ONCE AGAIN PLANNING TREK TO DAMASCUS. IMAM MUSA SADR WENT TO SYRIA JAN 19 AND JUMBLATT IS EXPECTED TO JOIN LEFTIST COLLEAGUES THERE JAN 20. FRANGIE VISIT IS STILL IN THE CARDS AT LATEST REPORT BUT CONTINUES

TO AWAIT ELUSIVE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT.

7. KARAME MET JAN 19 WITH SALAM, YAFI, GRAND MUFTI, IMAM MUSA AND JUMBLATT. WE UNDERSTAND GROUP DECIDED THAT KARAME WOULD NOT SUBMIT WRITTEN RESIGNATION FOR TIME BEING IN ORDER TO DEPRIVE FRANGIE OF BASIS FOR ACCEPTANCE. OTHER REPORTED DECISIONS CONFIRM OUR EXPECTATION THAT SUNNI MUSLIM POLITICIANS WOULD REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE IN GOVT IF KARAME SUBMITS FORMALL RESIGNATION AND FRANGIE ACCEPTS. TANNOUS OF PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE INFORMED US JAN 20 THAT FRANGIE PASSED WORD TO KARAME THAT HE (FRANGIE) HAD TAKEN NOTE OF KARAME PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO RESIGN BUT HOPED KARAME WOULD HOLD OFF UNTIL RESULTS OF CONTINUING SYRIAN EFFORTS TO ARRANGE COMPROMISE KNOWN. IT IS OUR STRONG IMPRESSION THAT KARAME, WHILE NOT WITHDRAWING HIS JAN 18 DECLARATION, IS AMENABLE TO REMAINING UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS. WE NOT AT PRESENT CERTAIN HIS PRECISE PRECONDITIONS, BUT ARE CONFIDENT THEY INCLUDE EFFECTIVE CEASEFIRE AND PRELIMINARY AGREEMENT ON FIVE POINTS OF MONTH-OLD SYRIAN FORMULA. WITH GOVT IN ABEYANCE AND CHRISTIAN FORCES EXPERIENCING A "HIGH" AS THEY CONTINUE TO "CREATE FACTS" IN EAST BEIRUT; WITH SECURITY PLUMMETING AS EMOTIONS RISE, POLITICAL PROCESS IS RUNNING POOR TO FAST-MOVING EVENTS ON GROUND.

8. FOOD SHORTAGES AND THE BREAKDOWN OF LAW AND ORDER HAVE GIVEN RISE TO INCREASE IN LOOTING OF FOOD STORES IN LAST FEW DAYS. CAR THIEVES ARE HAVING A FIELD DAY. AIRPORT REMAINS CLOSED AND APPARENTLY DECISION TO REOPEN IS UP TO PUBLIC WORKS MINISTER
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OSSEIRAN ON ADVICE FROM THE MILITARY. DESTRUCTION IN QUARANTINA IS REPORTEDLY EXTENSIVE. FIRE DAMAGE TO SHELL POL TERMINAL, LOCATED ACROSS THE RIVER FROM QUARANTINA AREA, APPARENTLY LIMITED TO WAREHOUSE CONTAINING PACKAGED POL PRODUCTS. OIL MARKETERS ARE STILL UNABLE TO RESUPPLY BAKERIES, HOSPITALS AND OTHER ESSENTIAL SERVICES.

9. WITH CLOSING OF AIRPORT, STREET BUYING RATE FOR DOLLARS HAS JUMPED FROM 2.45 POUNDS TO 2.60-2.65 POUNDS. NEWSPAPER REPORTS INDICATE THAT LEBANESE POUND NO LONGER BEING ACCEPTED AT HOTELS IN AMMAN AND DAMASCUS.
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